



Finding Legal Help in a Criminal Case

The United States Constitution guarantees everyone a right to a lawyer in a criminal case. If you have been charged with a crime it is essential that you get help from a lawyer. Even if you plan to plead guilty, a lawyer can help you understand your rights and aspects of your case that you may not know about.

Hire a Private Lawyer

- You may hire a lawyer in private practice to represent you. These lawyers will charge you a fee for their services.
- Search for a private lawyer through a referral service. The referral service will try to match you with a lawyer who has experience with criminal cases. You can then meet with that lawyer for a low fee. At the meeting, the lawyer will evaluate your case. They may quote you a price for their services.
- A complete list of lawyer referral services by county is available online at msba.org.

Apply for a Public Defender – District Court Commissioner’s Office

- If you cannot afford to hire a lawyer, apply for a Public Defender. If your application is accepted, a lawyer will be assigned to represent you.
- Following an arrest, you may be asked to apply at a bail review hearing. Even if you do not apply at that time or if you were not arrested, you may still apply any time after being charged.
- Submit your application to any District Court Commissioner office in the state. Locations are at mdcourts.gov/district/pdinfo or by calling 1-833-453-9799.
- Be sure to bring documents that establish you are eligible for their help including:
 - The court charging documents or traffic tickets.
 - Trial date notices from the Court.
 - If you are employed bring written proof of salary, such as pay stubs, or other verification of income for the last two pay periods.
 - If you are unemployed bring proof of public assistance. This may be documentation of medical assistance, Social Security, or other assistance you are receiving.
- Submit the [application](#), along with an [Informed Consent Release form](#).
- If the District Court Commissioner determines that you are eligible, you will receive a Final Qualification in writing. Contact the Public Defender at the number on the Final Qualification as soon as possible.



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Apply for a Public Defender – Office of the Public Defender

- In some cases, you should not apply at the District Court Commissioner. Instead, apply directly to the Office of the Public Defender if your case is:
 - A Child in Need of Assistance or “CINA” case;
 - A violation of probation;
 - An appeal to the Circuit Court, Court of Special Appeals, or the Court of Appeals; or
 - A juvenile delinquency case, meaning, you are a minor and your case is not being heard in adult criminal court.
- Visit the Office of the Public Defender website www.opd.state.md.us or call 1-877-430-5187 for more information.